PART

I

MANAGING IN CONTEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONS

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1 COMMUNICATING IN CONTEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to

- Describe the evolution of managerial communication from ancient times to today.
- Define the contingency approach to managerial communication and factors that should be considered when communicating in the workplace.
- Explain the role of effective communication in developing a culture of quality and ethics in the workplace.

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As we move deeper into the 21st century, management communication is both challenging and exciting. Organizations are becoming much more complex, and many new forces confront the manager. Greater competitive pressures, shorter product life cycles, increased demands for quality and service, more regulatory constraints, greater concerns for cost containment, heightened awareness of environmental concerns, and renewed emphasis on human rights are just some of the pressures increasing the complexity of the manager's job. But these pressures also make managerial communication exciting. The contemporary manager has a greater opportunity than ever to make a significant difference in the success of the organization and increase the quality of work life for fellow employees. But that requires effective managerial communication skills, which are becoming more complex, making them more difficult to master.

Research shows that professional skills like communication, the ability to work with different groups of people, and the capacity to infer what others are thinking and feeling are essential skills for managers. Technical skills are important to operations, of course, but managers must be able to collaborate with others, manage people and teams, exchange ideas, and solve problems. At the root of all of those tasks is the ability to communicate information effectively.[1]

The workplace is much more diverse and complex than it was just a few decades ago, and it requires more sophisticated management communication skills. At the start of the 20th century, heavy manufacturing was the industrial base of Western countries. Products changed little from year to year, and the workforce consisted mainly of white men. But today, products and entire management systems change rapidly, and employees must adapt just as quickly. In addition, work teams are extremely diverse. At Intel, one of the world's largest and highest-valued

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semiconductor chip makers, it is not uncommon to have a design engineer from Singapore working with a purchasing manager from Ireland and an accountant from California. This means the project manager must have the sophisticated skills required to communicate to a diverse work group in a rapidly changing environment.

Technology helps with this communication challenge, but it also adds new requirements. Advances in telecommunications have created new media for communicating and the ability to work remotely, but best practices are still evolving. We have more opportunities to interact with multiple cultures, which require that we become better cross-cultural communicators. Furthermore, as technical products and services become more complex, we must be able to communicate about more complicated concepts than in the past.

Effective communication is a leading indicator of financial performance. Willis Towers Watson, a global company that provides human capital and management consulting services, researched employee experience from more than 500 organizations from a broad range of industries and regions. They found that high performance companies communicate effectively, give employees a voice in decisions, encourage collaboration, and create environments where inclusion is the norm. These companies are 3.5 times more likely to significantly outperform their industry peers.[2]

Communication and its role in the life of an organization will continue to evolve. As a result, we must think about how communication will occur in the future. One way to understand what this will mean for managerial communication behavior is to look at the different stages through which managerial communication has already passed. As you read the following pages and note how managerial communication has changed over time, speculate how it will continue to change during your career. Knowledge of the past will help us prepare for the future.

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF MANAGERIAL COMMUNICATION

Managers communicated with employees in markedly different ways in the past than they do today. To best understand these changes, it is helpful to review the eras of management as listed in Table 1.1. We provide an overview of each era, then discuss the management communication strategies and techniques appropriate for that era.

Management Communication in Ancient Times

The earliest known example of managerial communication may be the recordkeeping procedure developed by Sumerian priests around 5000 BCE.[3] These records, consisting of pictograms scratched or pressed into clay tablets, reflected cross-cultural business transactions, such as payments of beer to workers.[4] Around the same time, Egyptians were developing hieroglyphics, which they wrote on clay, wood, or, most often, papyrus.[5] The Babylonians seem to have adopted cuneiform, the Sumerian form of writing. The Code of Hammurabi, circa 1750 BCE, includes information about wages and terms of contracts.[6] Tablets found in London reveal that

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TABLE 1.1 ■ Historical Perspective of Managerial Communication

Era	Characteristics	Communication
Ancient and medieval	Initial efforts to organize commerce	Written records
1900s Scientific management Administrative theory	Clearly defined job duties, time specifications for completing the task, and adherence to rules Emphasis on authority and discipline	One-way communication, heavy reliance on written job instructions and rules Emergence of gangplank theory
1920s Human relations	Importance of relationship between managers and workers	Importance of listening and interpersonal communication skills
1950s Behavioral	Recognition of complexity of organizational behavior and communication	Development of communication theory, beginning to apply theory to organizational practice
1990s Empowerment	Distribution of power to everyone in the organization	Two-way communication, participation of employees
21st century Contingency	Interdependence of jobs, organizations, and people	Application of appropriate communication strategy to the situation

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the ancient Romans were the first managers, using commercial languages to request payments, lend money, and settle legal disputes in the year 57 CE.[7] The first committee may have been organized around 325 BCE, as Alexander the Great organized staff groups.

Venice, Italy, was a major center for merchants and economic exchange during medieval times. Merchants built warehouses and used an inventory system that required periodic reports for the city governing body.[8] These brief examples indicate that since the beginning of commerce, some type of managerial communication has been practiced.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Why was written language so important to the development of managerial communication?
2. Other than technology use, what has changed in the way business is conducted? How does studying the evolution of managerial communication help us understand and appreciate contemporary practices?

1900s: Management Efficiency and One-Way Communication

The systematic evolution of managers as communicators began around the turn of the 20th century. The *scientific management* philosophy stressed the scientific study and organization of work. During this era, it was believed that the greatest levels of efficiency could be obtained

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with extremely precise job instructions and that employees should not second-guess the instructions. This period was characterized by one-way communication at work.

Scientific management was founded by Frederick Taylor, a supervisor at the Philadelphia Midvale Steel Company in the late 1800s. Taylor believed it was possible to document the most efficient and effective procedure for performing a task, which could be written in elaborate job designs and communicated to employees through extensive training. To Taylor, employees were just another element in his formula.[9] Other proponents of scientific management included Frank Gilbreth, who studied motion to make bricklaying more efficient, and Harrington Emerson, who developed 12 principles of efficiency for the railroads. One of Emerson's most repeated principles was discipline, which included adherence to rules and strict obedience.[10]

We still see elements of the scientific method today in businesses such as McDonald's, whose founder, Ray Kroc, used scientific management techniques to bring quality, service, cleanliness, and value to the fast-food industry. Every employee has a precise job description, each task is to be completed in a specified period, and there is strict adherence to rules. These procedures allow employees to be trained in a short time and reduce the number of unique conditions to which managers must adapt. Only limited strategic managerial communication is required.[11]

While scientific management was receiving extensive attention in the United States, *administrative theory* was developing in France. Although this approach to management emerged during the same era as scientific management, its focus was quite different. Scientific management was concerned mainly with making processes efficient, but administrative theory focused on broader issues facing all managers.

A key figure in developing administrative theory was Henri Fayol, who developed 14 principles of management.[12] Two-way communication between the manager and employee is limited; the manager's authority is emphasized. The manager's role is to give orders and maintain discipline; little attention is placed on listening skills. This approach is similar to the military model of the time, in which officers were extremely autocratic—soldiers were not encouraged to provide feedback to them, and the officers seldom listened. It is also comparable to the political system used in totalitarian governments.

Teamwork and participative decision making were not integral to administrative theory. Fayol recognized the traditional organization hierarchy as important in establishing the chain of command. However, he also saw inefficiencies in the system when employees at the same level needed to communicate. Figure 1.1 shows how Employee B would communicate with Employee J according to prevailing thought at the time. The employee would have to send the message up the organization's chain of command to the top; then the message would come down through another chain of command. The implications for inefficiency and ineffectiveness are clear to contemporary managers.

To bypass these problems, Fayol developed what is now famously known as *gangplank theory*. According to this theory, Employee B would be allowed to communicate directly with Employee J if each had permission from their immediate supervisors to do so and they kept the supervisors apprised of the communication. Figure 1.2 diagrams informal networks and horizontal communication.

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FIGURE 1.1 ■ Following the Hierarchy

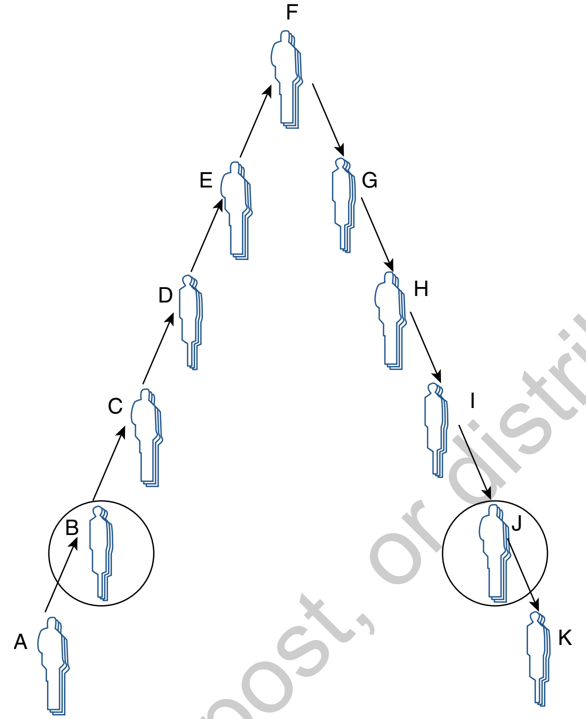
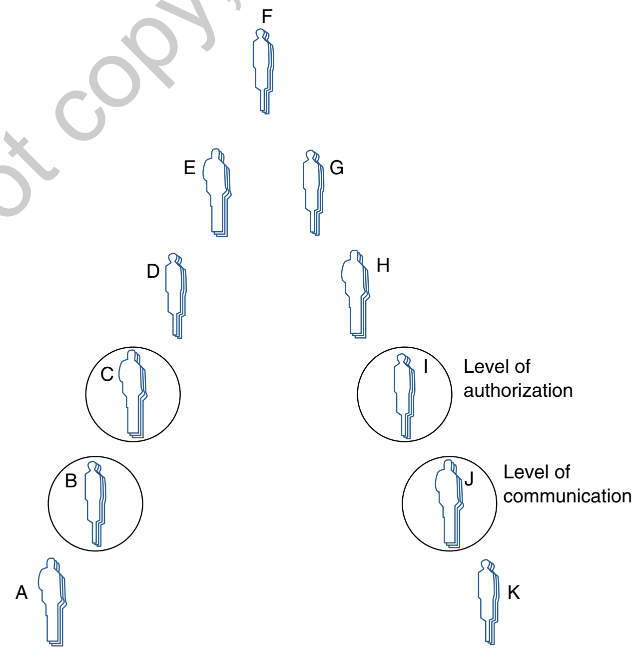


FIGURE 1.2 ■ Gangplank Theory



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Scientific management and administrative theory attempted to systematize the work environment by establishing a set of elaborate rules and communicating them to employees. Managerial authority was not to be questioned, and deviations from the norm or negotiations were not allowed. Gangplank theory was the first formal recognition of horizontal communication and acknowledged the importance of organizational structure and informal communication networks, which are now taken for granted in most contemporary organizations. As communication practices continued to evolve, autocratic practices began to be replaced by interpersonal communication.

1920s: The Human Relations Approach and the Rise of Interpersonal Communication

While scientific management and administrative theory focused on compliance and efficiency, others were beginning to study the relationships between organizational members. In the human relations approach, managerial communication was the focus of attention, rather than carefully planned procedures. The heart of the human relations approach is that attention to social needs and participation improves morale. In turn, this morale leads to greater compliance with managerial authority.

Dale Carnegie was one of the first writers to link communication skill with managerial effectiveness. In *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936), Carnegie argued that gaining compliance from other people depends on interpersonal dynamics of attraction and influence.[13] Influence is possible by listening, showing an interest in others' concerns, and gaining their confidence.[14] Although his primary audience was not managers, the applicability to managerial communication was clear. Commitment is gained through interpersonal communication skills. This was a radical change to those who previously believed a manager could "buy" commitment with economic motivators or coerce it through the authority of a manager's position.

While Dale Carnegie was presenting his seminars, Elton Mayo led a group of Harvard professors in a series of studies that became known as the Hawthorne studies.[15] At Western Electric Company's Hawthorne plant in Illinois, management followed the scientific management principles to produce telephones. Little personal communication occurred between managers and employees; job specifications and work rules were spelled out. The manager's job was to enforce them through authority and discipline.

A group of industrial engineers was studying the effect of increasing the light in work areas on productivity. The engineers set out to find the optimum conditions, but the results of the study defied explanation. Productivity increased regardless of what the researchers did to the lighting. To understand why their principles failed, researchers isolated and observed a small group of workers. These studies included changes in compensation, rest periods, work schedules, and work methods. In general, productivity increased during the studies regardless of changes in the work conditions.

Critical Thinking Questions

Recall a time when the instructor of a course or training class asked for your input on the course topics, schedule, methods, or even the meeting time and location.

1. How did the ability to voice your opinion influence the amount you learned?
2. How did it affect your interest and motivation?

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The researchers finally concluded that the *relationship* between the researchers and the workers accounted for the results. Traditionally, scientific management advocates simply observed workers to identify the most efficient way to organize a job. The Hawthorne researchers had shown personal interest in the workers as they consulted with and kept them informed about changes. The relationship established between the researchers and the employees was quite different from that of the managers and employees in other parts of the plant.

Because the results differed from what was expected, the industrial engineers continued to study working conditions. In what may have been the first use of extensive interviewing in the workplace, the researchers asked thousands of employees about their attitudes toward working conditions, managers, and work in general. The interviews indicated that people who work under similar conditions experience these conditions in different ways and assign different meanings to their experiences.

The research concluded that employees' attitudes depend on the social organization of the group and their positions in these groups. Mayo recommended that managers be friendly in their relationships with workers, listen to workers' concerns, and give them a sense of participation in decisions so that they could meet their social needs.[16] In many respects, both Mayo and Carnegie were similar in their advice, and both were in stark contrast to the scientific management philosophy.

Or were they? Did this human relations approach really differ from the scientific management approach? Some would argue that both Mayo and Carnegie were promoting highly manipulative managerial communication strategies intended only to gain compliance from workers and to promote acceptance of managerial authority.

Although the general orientation of management during this era may have been manipulative, the human relations approach pointed out the importance of interpersonal communication. The legacy of the human relations approach is that managing groups, listening, and interviewing are now all considered integral to managerial communication.

1950s: The Behavioral Approach and Organizational Communication

During the 1950s, managers' behavior received extensive attention. Economics, anthropology, psychology, and sociology were all applied to understanding workplace communication. No longer were employees viewed only as tools used to complete a job. Peter Drucker was among the first management gurus to assert that workers should be treated as assets, not as liabilities. He originated the view of the corporation as a human community built on trust and respect for the worker, not just a profit-making machine.[17] Many management theories emerged during this era, such as McGregor's theory X and theory Y, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Likert's four systems of management, Blake and Mouton's managerial grid, and Herzberg's motivational model. These theories, explained in most comprehensive management textbooks, have valuable information about what is required for effective managerial communication. Unfortunately, the theoretical explanations of managerial behavior became extremely complex—too complex for most managers to understand and apply. Many training programs were developed to help managers apply these theories, but often little benefit resulted.

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While theories were being developed about behavior at work, much also was being done in the area of communication theory. For instance, J. L. Austen developed the speech act theory, which maintains that certain communication conventions must be used to be effective, and David Berlo developed a model emphasizing two-way communication.[18] Attention was given to social influences on communication, but, unfortunately, the social context of managers was given little or no attention.[19]

The nature of organizational structure also received extensive attention. Organizations of the 1950s and 1960s were recognized as being different from those of the early 1900s. Karl Weick's theory of organizing made it clear that organizations are not stable, static entities; rather, they are continually evolving. Internal and external communication networks are continually evolving, too. Changing types of information and factors such as rumors and informal communication must be considered by managers when communicating.

Forty years earlier, Fayol recognized the importance of communication networks and organizational structure when he presented the gangplank concept. Now, entire organizations and their structure were receiving renewed attention.[20] The nature of managerial and employee behavior, the study of communication, and an analysis of the nature of organizations all had important implications for managers as communicators. However, as mentioned earlier, these studies resulted in a complex body of knowledge that was difficult for managers to use. Out of this behavioral approach, the era of employee empowerment emerged.

1990s: The Empowerment Approach and Participative Communication

Empowerment is power sharing, or the delegation of power or authority to employees in the organization.[21] Since the emergence of the behavioral approach, we have seen a major shift away from the centralization of power. Empowerment encourages employees to participate fully in the organization. In the 1990s, we began to see power being given to others in the organization, so that they could act more freely to accomplish their jobs.

As companies experienced more intense global competition and rapidly developing technology, many top managers believed giving up centralized control would promote faster product development, flexibility, and quality. In a 1989 study, 74 percent of the chief executive officers surveyed reported that they were more participatory, were more consensus oriented, and relied more on communication than on command than in years past. They found less value in being dictatorial, autocratic, or imperial.[22] The chief executive officer's letter to the General Electric stockholders in the 1990 annual report provides an example of the empowerment philosophy. In this letter, the CEO asserted that managers must learn to delegate, facilitate, listen, and trust. He talked about the sharing of ideas to develop one vision for the huge corporation.

Sharing a vision means sharing information. In the traditional organization, the top managers are frequently the only ones who know the financial condition of the company, but in organizations that empower employees, information is shared with everyone. For instance, Springfield Remanufacturing Corp. in Springfield, Missouri, is an employee-owned company where workers on the line know—and are taught to understand—almost everything the president knows about costs and revenues, departmental productivity, and strategic priorities.[23] The empowerment movement can be seen in union–management relations; union

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members have become more involved in management decisions as management provides more information to them. In fact, information sharing is often part of contract negotiations.[24] Both management and union members can be found on work quality and productivity improvement teams.

You may not be surprised that attempts at empowerment faced many challenges. Caterpillar Inc., the heavy-equipment manufacturer, worked with the United Auto Workers in the 1980s to improve employee relations, including a program that asked shop floor workers to submit ideas for improving operations. However, when the industry met financial troubles in 1991, the employee involvement program became the victim of a bitter battle between the company and the United Auto Workers. An adversarial relationship between union and management returned; accordingly, one-way communication was more frequent than would be expected in an environment of empowerment.[25]

Although efforts to empower employees may run into problems, a number of strategies for empowering employees can be attempted, such as autonomous work groups, self-leadership, work-out groups, and quality circles. But, as mentioned in the discussion of the behavioral approach, some of the theories and programs for empowerment can become so complicated that they are difficult to apply and are not suitable for every contemporary organization. As a result, the contingency approach has emerged as a management philosophy that makes sense in the early 21st century.[26]

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21st Century: The Contingency Approach to Management Communication

The *contingency approach* recognizes the importance of matching different situations with varying communication strategies. The most effective and efficient strategy varies from one situation to another and depends on a number of factors. Effective managers see the interdependence of the various aspects of jobs, organizations, and communication. A communication method that is highly effective at one time and place may be ineffective in another situation. The contingency approach recognizes that there is no one best way to communicate.

For example, during a crisis, a manager may tell employees exactly what to do because two-way communication might waste time or employees may not have a holistic view of the organization. But during periods of growth, discussion between the manager and employees may generate new ideas. Each communication strategy—the autocratic approach and the participative approach—is appropriate in different situations.

The contingency approach has grown in popularity recently because of the complexity of organizations. Especially in multinational and multicultural organizations, managers must understand that there is no one best way of communicating; effective communication is contingent on the situation. That is not to say, however, that contemporary organizations are managed chaotically. On the contrary, accountability and oversight systems have been emphasized since the meltdown of multinationals such as Enron, Adelphia, and WorldCom in the early 2000s. The Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 (especially Section 404) stresses the need for business control and auditing processes. The point is that as corporate governance becomes more transparent,

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information flows more freely and effective managers adapt to the complexities of each situation when communicating.

In summary, each era approaches communication differently but helps us better understand communication within contemporary organizations and the type of communication that may be appropriate in the future. Good ideas can be drawn from the scientific, administrative, human relations, behavioral, and empowerment approaches to communication. For example, without the administrative and human relations orientations, managerial communication might still focus on keeping records, giving orders, and maintaining discipline. Creative analysis is required to ensure that communication strategies adapt to the varying contingencies.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. What are some of the complexities in today's business environment that make the contingency model appropriate?
2. Think about a message you have received recently from work, school, or another group to which you belong. What might be the contributing factors in the situation that guided the writer's decisions?

FACTORS AFFECTING COMMUNICATION CONTINGENCIES

The nature of communication and a strategic model of managerial communication are presented in Chapter 2. The discussion here presents three contingencies that should be considered when developing a strategy for managerial communication. It is impossible to review all contingencies because every manager faces many unique situations. However, it is possible to review the major current events that may influence a manager's environment. The following sections review diversity, competition and product quality, and ethics as major social and business influences that affect managerial communication.

Diversity

Today, everyone works with more diverse populations than just a few decades ago. Beginning in the 1960s, the United States embraced tolerance and diversity as a strategic mission. However, minimizing cultural bias in the workplace continues to be a challenge for managers. This challenge, which is discussed throughout this text, means managers must not only be able to communicate with a greater variety of audiences but also help their employees see diversity as a corporate asset rather than a liability. Diversity is linked to increased profitability and creativity, stronger governance, and better problem-solving abilities that help organizations be resilient and innovative.[27]

The contemporary manager should be particularly aware of how diversity affects their communication practices. In this section, we consider diversity not only in terms of culture and ethnicity but also gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, disabilities, age, and education.

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Culture and Ethnicity

The increasing diversity of the U.S. workforce is a reflection of the increasingly diverse population. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that 18 percent are Hispanic, 13 percent are Black, 7 percent are Asian, and 2 percent are two or more races.[28] This demographic phenomenon brings a range of interests, languages, and cultures that affects the way business is conducted. For example, dialects such as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) are often mocked as inferior to "standard" English, although they have their own grammar and are widely used by millions of people throughout the United States.[29]

It is also critical for businesses to know the demographic makeup of geographical regions so that they can effectively localize products, services, and marketing. To capture the growing multicultural market, U.S. businesses must offer products and services that appeal to these different regions, and they must adapt advertising and promotional appeals accordingly.

Managers must be aware of regional differences that could influence work values and communication styles to effectively communicate with other managers and employees of all cultural backgrounds. For example, managers in Arizona may have many Hispanic or Latinx employees, but a job transfer to Hawaii may involve managing more Asian employees than before.[30] Executives, such as purchasing managers, must be familiar with cross-cultural communication because of the increase in international business. International purchasing alliances too frequently fail because of poor communication.[31] This may be termed *intercultural business communication*, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 12.

In less than 20 years, the landscape will become even more diverse in terms of race and ethnicity, making effective communication strategies even more important. Managers must be aware of linguistic, cultural, geographical, and even religious differences that could influence their own work values and communication styles as well as those of the people around them.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Recall a recent TV commercial or advertisement of one of your favorite products. How does the persuasive message appeal to multicultural audiences?
2. How could it be improved?

Gender

During the early 20th century, women who worked (by choice or by circumstances) often held routine, low-level manufacturing or clerical jobs; their professional options were mostly limited to teaching and nursing. Meanwhile, men had a greater variety of jobs, such as in management and engineering. Overall, men worked mostly with men, and women worked with other women or children.

But today women have greater opportunities and access to most professions. About 57 percent of women participate in the workforce, representing 47 percent of the U.S. labor market in 2022. In 1983, only about one third of managers were women, but by 2022, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, women filled 51.5 percent of management, professional, and related

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occupations.[32] Yet in the same year, only 44 companies in the Fortune 500 were led by women, a record high.[33] Many organizations have no women in leadership positions. Overall, far more women are employed part-time than men.[34] This "broken rung" of the corporate ladder shows that there is still room to grow.[35]

During the past three decades, much has been written about how men and women communicate differently. Are men more assertive than women? Do women show more social support and sympathy to colleagues? Do men and women provide different types of feedback? Do leadership styles of men and women differ? Do women convey a different nonverbal message with the same gesture? Do men use space differently with other men than with women? Do men and women use different persuasive strategies? In many cases, the answers to these and similar questions are not clear; furthermore, there is evidence that the answers evolve as general social changes occur.

Sexual harassment is an example of a factor that affects communication at work. When some people think of sexual harassment, they think of touching or making physical advances. However, sexual harassment can also be a ribald joke, extensive eye gaze, or even unexpected and unwelcome proximity. Other examples of sexual harassment in the workplace can include changes in work schedules that make it difficult for a worker to arrange child care or participate in meetings and events.[36] Following the advance of the #MeToo movement in late 2017, organizations began to realize the pervasiveness of sexual harassment and assault in the workplace, and they took action to protect employees through improved reporting procedures and bystander training. An unfortunate consequence has been a "chilling effect" on workplace camaraderie as men are reluctant to interact with women.[37] Addressing the problem will require organizations to revise policies and change cultures to encourage reporting and discussion about the issue. Mentoring relationships and professional networks can also help women address issues of harassment and move into leadership roles in their organizations.[38]

Because of the evolving nature of communication and workplace relationships, definitive answers on gender differences in communication are difficult. But strong arguments for differences have been presented. In her best-selling book *You Just Don't Understand*, Deborah Tannen makes a case for supporting the differences in communication styles of men and women based on both inherited traits and learned behavior.[39] These differences often cause men and women to experience miscommunication with each other at work. As Sallie Krawcheck, CEO of the financial services firm Ellevest, explains, women in management may be more risk averse than men, often take a longer-term perspective, and are often more relationship oriented. Such gender differences should be considered complementary rather than problematic, because research shows that diversity in work teams leads to better outcomes. (See Chapter 4 for a thorough examination of team communication.) Effective managers must be sensitive to gender differences and make special efforts to adjust their communication based on these differences.[40]

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Although stigma and reporting techniques make statistics difficult to measure, approximately 4.5 percent of the U.S. population identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ).[41] In 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that it is illegal to fire employees based on their sexual orientation or gender identity; before this ruling, LGBTQ employees were in

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a precarious position. Should they present their authentic selves and risk bullying, discrimination, and termination or hide themselves from their coworkers?

According to the United Nations, countries that marginalize LGBTQ employees experience decreased economic output.[42] On a more local scale, employees who are afraid to be themselves experience more stress, more health issues, and lower productivity than other employees. Companies that tolerate bullying, discrimination, or marginalizing behavior are more likely to experience turnover and lose the valuable contributions of this group of employees.[43]

Organizations should review their policies, dress codes, and benefits. Managers should take care to avoid heteronormative language and prying questions about sexual orientation or gender identity. Ask employees about their preferred pronouns, and respect the use of "they" as a singular, gender-neutral pronoun. After all, the practice has existed for centuries in the English language. The message to all employees should be "You are welcome and safe here."[44]

People With Disabilities

Approximately 20 percent of the U.S. population live with a physical or mental impairment that limits one or more major life activities. They may struggle to walk, see, hear, lift, concentrate, or learn. They may have weakened immune systems or impaired function in respiratory, circulatory, or neurological systems. Within the U.S. workforce, 21 percent of people with disabilities are employed, compared to 65 percent of those without disabilities. Many people in this group work in service positions, and about one third work part-time.[45] They are underrepresented in management and professional occupations, but they are more likely to be self-employed.

Why is unemployment so high for this group? Employers may have a lack of awareness of disability and accommodation issues, a fear of legal liability, and concern over costs.[46] Stereotypes that portray people with disabilities as unreliable or underperformers may cause unconscious bias during hiring.

As with other forms of diversity, hiring people with disabilities brings valuable perspectives, broadens the pool of talent, and demonstrates corporate social responsibility.[47] To recruit and retain employees with disabilities, managers should ensure that their facilities are accessible, revise human resource policies to remove ableist language, offer flexible work schedules, and restructure jobs and modify the work environment to accommodate a variety of needs and to use principles of ergonomic design.[48] The growing availability of remote work also appears to be a significant factor in increasing labor force participation by people with disabilities.[49]

Age and Generational Differences

People in the United States are living longer, and the average employee is getting older. Five generations are working together, and the difference in lived experiences can be challenging to managers and employees alike. The worker who is 30 years old in 2024 has lived in a much different world from that of the worker who is 60. The 30-year-old, born in 1994, came of age during the recession of 2008. This worker is likely to feel comfortable with remote work and communication technologies, and they value the flexibility of working from home and multicultural social networks. The 60-year-old remembers the heady expanse of the 1980s and the dot-com bubble of the early 2000s. They may feel more comfortable with working in the office

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and have considerable institutional knowledge. As more employees report to someone younger, tensions build. Older workers may feel that their experience isn't valued or that they have been passed over for promotions or raises.[50] Younger managers may feel that their decisions are being questioned. Both groups may feel that the skills of older workers are outdated.[51]

Yet there is some evidence that age differences are not as problematic as the generational stereotypes that pit one group against another.[52] Generation gaps are natural, but mutual respect and open lines of communication are the recipe for a productive professional relationship across generations. Managers should help their teams focus on shared goals and values while recognizing individual strengths. Older workers may have a strong work ethic and avoid drama. Younger workers tend to think and act quickly, and they are often willing to try out new ideas and technologies.[53] Respecting each other's strengths and helping others continue to grow will benefit everyone in the workplace. Managers must consider age diversity as a factor that affects their communication contingencies because of its implications for workplace harmony.

Education

In addition to other demographic shifts, the workforce's education is changing dramatically. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 28 percent of U.S. residents 25 and older have a high school degree, 23 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher, and 14 percent have advanced degrees.[54] As you move up through the management ranks, there is a good chance that you will manage people who have more experience or knowledge than you do.[55] In the scientific management era, a manager could simply tell an educated employee what to do; however, today managers must listen to the employee and seek assistance with problem solving.

In summary, differences in culture and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, disabilities, age, and education should be considered when communicating with others. Given the increasingly diverse workforce, today's managers need to develop competencies that will enable effective communication internally with bosses, employees, and coworkers and externally with customers, suppliers, vendors, regulatory agencies, and the public.

Competition and the Drive for Quality

As explained in the previous section, diversity is an important managerial communication contingency. A second is quality, which is a competitive advantage for business. A pioneer of the drive for quality, W. Edwards Deming, pointed out that in order to continuously improve quality, systems must be in place for gathering feedback from the employees and customers. Contemporary managers now accept the idea that business is a globally competitive game and quality is the key to victory. *Competitive advantage* and *quality* are common words in business today. But what do the terms mean?

Competition may be considered the effort of two or more parties acting independently to secure the business of a third party by offering the most attractive terms. In a competitive environment, the organization must produce a product or service in a more efficient and effective manner than its competitors, and the service or product must possess greater value at the same or lower price. Little room exists for errors; defective parts must be minimal, few or no reworked

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parts can be allowed, few product repairs can be tolerated, and delivery cycles must be short. Continuous efforts are required to find new ways to improve the product or service while reducing costs.

Some of the characteristics an organization needs to gain competitive advantage in today's markets include the ability to do the following:

- Access resources.
- Add value.
- Develop a good skills base among the workforce.
- Attract investment.
- Develop nonprice characteristics that appeal to other markets.
- Be price competitive.
- Be efficient.
- Use technology.
- Be innovative.

As you look over this list of factors, note that most directly rely on management's communication competencies. Today's managers must be able to gather information and ideas, share data, promote solutions, and persuade others to ensure continuous process improvement. Managers must be efficient and effective communicators in a fast-paced, highly competitive environment. When time is limited, managers must be strategic in their communication practices.

Let us look at an example. Toyota is one of the largest automakers in the United States by production and one of the 15 largest companies in the world in terms of sales and market value.[56] Toyota relies on manufacturing systems, statistical process control, and other proven methods under a continuous improvement strategy to produce high-quality products that consumers demand. All the elements, including management's communication with dealers, suppliers, and employees, contribute to Toyota's reputation for quality.[57]

To enhance their competitiveness, many organizations use cross-functional work teams in which employees learn a variety of tasks and work together. It is almost the direct opposite of the scientific management approach. When cross-functional work teams are used, managers must understand and coordinate a variety of activities. They must be able to communicate from a variety of perspectives.

In some cases, entire organizational cultures must be changed. After struggling in the early 1980s, Ford Motor Company embraced the principles of total quality management and adopted the motto "Quality Is Job One." Here is a simple example of how the organization's quality culture works: A Ford automobile assembly worker believed he had a better way to mount the door mirror. After several discussions with the departmental managers, a better procedure was implemented.[58] In 2003, as Ford celebrated its 100th anniversary, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Bill Ford said, "Our success always has been driven by

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our products and our people. . . . We're going to apply fresh thinking and innovative technology to everything we do, from our basic business processes to the products that define who we are as a company."[59] This dedication appears to be paying off: Ford vehicles consistently rank high in J.D. Power quality ratings.

Managers must be able to communicate a real interest in quality, and they must be willing to listen to employees about quality improvements. A corporate culture focused on quality will provide a competitive edge.

Ethics

A third major contingency that managers should consider when communicating is business ethics. The dangers of unethical behavior have been exemplified in recent years by major scandals in the corporate world. In the early 21st century, executives at Adelphia, Arthur Andersen, Enron, WorldCom, Martha Stewart Omnimedia, HealthSouth, and other corporations were charged with major ethics violations such as accounting fraud, stock manipulation, obstructing justice, lying, and so on. In many cases, the accused executives were convicted, and, in some cases, their companies were even destroyed. In 2016, Wells Fargo admitted that its employees had created hundreds of thousands of fake accounts to meet quotas; a year later, it admitted that employees had also sold customers car insurance that they didn't need, causing some to go into default on their loans and have their cars repossessed.[60] In 2022, the collapse of cryptocurrency exchange FTX and the arrest of its CEO, Sam Bankman-Fried, weakened the faith in the legitimacy of cryptocurrency around the world.[61] Such events have triggered renewed concern for ethical standards in business.

Ethical dilemmas and temptations face managers at all levels, not just the political leaders and corporate executives who receive the attention of journalists. The top ethical issues in business today include corporate accounting practices, social media and reputation management, workplace relationships (including harassment), health and safety, pay equity, and privacy. Consider the following examples of ethical issues in managerial communication:

- The supervisor of a travel agency was aware his agents could receive large bonuses for booking 100 or more clients each month with an auto rental firm, although clients typically wanted the rental agency selected on the basis of lowest cost. The agents worked on a commission basis. Should the supervisor "warn" his employees, or should they be trusted to use their best judgment?
- The executive in charge of a parts distribution facility told employees to tell phone customers that inventory was in stock, even if it was not. Replenishing the items took only one or two days; no one was hurt by the delay. Is it ethical for the company to omit this information?
- The project manager for a consulting assignment wondered whether some facts should be left out of a report because the marketing executives paying for the report would look bad if the facts were included. What is the project manager's ethical responsibility?

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- A North American manufacturer operating abroad was asked to make cash payments (a bribe) to government officials and was told it was consistent with local customs, despite being illegal in the United States under the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act.[62] Should the manufacturer make such payments?

Answers to these questions are not easy, and in today's atmosphere of cynicism and mistrust, little room for error exists. Chapter 2 discusses the concept of communication climate and points out that trust is essential to developing a positive communication climate. Unfortunately, managers have difficulty developing trust when so many blatant examples of mistrust surface and individual managers face conflicting ethical demands.

No concrete set of ethical rules exists. There is no law to follow. Many behaviors have not been codified, and managers must be sensitive to emerging norms and values. Sensitivity to the nuances of ethical communication is the only way to maintain employee trust.

Critical Thinking Questions

Examine the code of conduct for a company, profession, or industry you are interested in.

1. How does the code guide the conduct of its members?
2. What are the consequences of violating it (if any)?
3. What do you consider the most important reason that codes of conduct exist?

Because no universal laws exist, what one person or group considers ethical may be unethical to another. The question of taking bribes is a good example; they are quite ethical in one country but unethical and even illegal in another. Organizations are assisting managers with the many ethical quandaries they face when communicating by providing guidelines, seminars, and workshops. A recent survey of 71 U.S.-based global organizations in a range of industries found that employee ethics training is, in fact, commonplace; ethics training not only fosters ethical behavior among employees but also improves organizational performance.[63]

Another strategy many companies use to improve communication ethics is to develop a formal code of ethics. The code clarifies company expectations of employee conduct and makes clear that the company expects its personnel to recognize the ethical dimensions of corporate behavior and communication. A code of conduct may be broad or specific, and most address managerial communication. For instance, the following is taken from International Paper's code of conduct, which is published on the company's website:

> At International Paper, we do the right things, in the right ways, for the right reasons, all of the time — this is The IP Way. The IP Way and our Core Values help us pursue our vision to be among the most successful, sustainable and responsible companies in the world. Ethics is one of those Core Values — it guides our actions and decisions and is a constant reminder of what we believe and how we operate.[64]

Another possibility is an ethics committee or an ethics ombudsperson. With this approach, either one executive or a panel of executives is appointed to oversee the organization's ethics and

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serve as a consultant to managers and employees. This provides an opportunity for a manager to seek advice when confronted with an ethical issue.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING MANAGERIAL COMMUNICATION

An internal research study at Google intended to prove what many employees around the world believe: "managers are, at best, a necessary evil, and at worst, a layer or bureaucracy." But to everyone's surprise, the data showed the opposite. Good managers can make teams happier and more productive, and of the top 10 managerial behaviors identified in the study, six are related to communication.[65]

- Communicates by actively listening and sharing information
- Creates an inclusive team environment by showing concern for success and well-being of the team and individuals
- Coaches employees with constructive feedback
- Supports career development and discusses performance
- Expresses a clear vision and strategy
- Collaborates across the company

Employee engagement suffers when employees feel uncertainty, but giving them the information they need helps them become happier and more productive.[66]

A survey by the American Management Association showed that communication, interpersonal skills, collaboration, cultural sensitivity, and diversity are some of the most common topics for employee training.[67] Jennifer Jones, director of the training firm AMA Enterprise, says that communication skills are essential for managers to succeed in their jobs:

> Communication is actually an umbrella term for such core skills as listening, thinking clearly, interpreting organizational concepts, being alert to non-verbal signals as well as dealing with any stress or emotional issues in working with co-workers or supervisors. Indeed, understood correctly communications helps a person understand a situation, resolve differences and build trust. It's essential for a productive workplace to encourage creativity and collaboration in order to solve problems or achieve business objectives.[68]

The Project Management Institute (PMI) considers communication to be one of four "power skills" that are essential for professionals, along with collaborative leadership, strategic thinking, and problem solving. However, talent developers told PMI they spend more of their budget on developing technical skills (51%) than power skills (25%).[69] By reading this book, you are developing the power skills that will help you gain a competitive advantage over your peers.

This introductory chapter presents a historical overview of managerial communication, concluding that the contingency approach is the most appropriate, and it reviews three factors that affect contingencies. But organizational management and the corresponding communication are

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in constant transition. Not every contingency can be discussed, and managers must remain creative and strategic as they communicate in many unique and challenging situations. Our challenge is to understand management communication and begin to prepare for these changes. This book will help you compose messages that focus on the needs of your readers, explain ideas in a clear and ethical manner, and strengthen your reputation as a good communicator.

SUMMARY

Since ancient and medieval times, managerial communication has changed from an autocratic, one-way practice to a participatory approach that empowers employees to contribute to decisions and solutions. In recent years, the contingency approach has become more widely used as managers realize there is no single best way to communicate. Managers must analyze the contingency factors of each situation and adapt their strategies accordingly.

To better understand managerial situations, several contemporary dynamics affecting communication are presented. Different types of diversity are reviewed: culture and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, people with disabilities, age, and education. The work population will probably become more diverse in the majority of these attributes.

The drive for competitive advantage through improved product and service quality also affects managerial communication. As a result, everything will occur in shorter time cycles, and less room for error will exist as a result of quality demands.

Ethics is another contemporary dynamic that must be considered. Although management ethics can create difficult communication decisions, organizations provide assistance with training programs and codes of ethics. In addition to these dynamics affecting contemporary communication, trends imply that communication will become more frequent, intense, and intercultural as it grows in importance.

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MANAGER'S CHECKLIST

Apply these strategies to be an effective communicator in the workplace.

- ☐ Be aware of how diversity affects your communication practices, and minimize cultural bias in your decisions.
- ☐ Help your employees see diversity as a corporate asset rather than a liability.
- ☐ Communicate a real interest in quality products, services, and business practices by gathering information, sharing data, and promoting solutions to problems.
- ☐ Be willing to listen to employees about quality improvements and persuade others to embrace continuous process improvement.
- ☐ Be sensitive to emerging norms and differing cultural values.
- ☐ Seek advice when confronted with an ethical issue.

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CASES FOR ANALYSIS

Case 1.1: Women in the White House

During Barack Obama's presidency, women on his staff were frustrated about their lack of influence. They were often outnumbered by men in meetings. They struggled to contribute to the conversation. When they did get a chance to speak, their contributions were often ignored or a man would repeat the idea and get the credit.

To counteract this behavior and make their voices heard, the women used a strategy called amplification. "When a woman made a key point, other women would repeat it, giving credit to its author. This forced the men in the room to recognize the contribution—and denied them the chance to claim the idea as their own."[70]

President Obama soon noticed the technique. He began calling on women more, and the number of women staffers increased as well.

Questions

1. Why might women be reluctant to speak up in meetings?
2. What are the potential consequences of letting one demographic dominate workplace discussions and decisions?
3. What other strategies can people who have been traditionally underrepresented in the workplace use to make their voices heard?

Case 1.2: Ethics and Technology

Chris smiled as he received the analysis packet from his supervisor. He had been working from home for GEH Mortgage Company, analyzing mortgage applications, for the past three years. This particular application involved not just a home mortgage but also an entire farmstead, a home and business. Whenever he received an assignment he did not know how to analyze, he would call on his friend Joel, whom he had known since high school, to help him accomplish such tasks. He compensated Joel, usually with a case of beer, when they got together on the weekends. Chris knew he could trust Joel to do a good job on the analysis, because Joel had double majored in finance and accounting at a regional university. Chris would then tailor the analysis according to the way the firm expected reports to be submitted.

Chris was perceived as one of the most dependable analysts in the division because of his past work, much of which had been farmed out to Joel. He had received accolades and raises as a result and was enjoying a successful career with the firm.

Questions

1. The method used by Chris is obviously successful, and the company is satisfied with the results. Is it just good business, or is there an ethical dilemma present?
2. Should Chris confess to his supervisor or just continue the successful deception?

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3. What are the privacy issues, given that the information used in these analyses is proprietary and sensitive?
4. Does this activity fit the notion of plagiarism?
5. Do electronic communication and the telecommuting arrangement make Chris's actions more likely than if he were in the office?

Case 1.3: Like Grandfather, Like Granddaughter?

Clarence opened a farm supply store in Montana during the early 1940s. His neighbors in the county were also his customers. Every person who walked into his store felt comfortable. In fact, they would often sit, sip a cup of coffee or shell some peanuts, and solve the world's problems before loading up their purchases. Clarence prided himself on knowing what his customers needed to be successful farmers, and he freely gave them advice about which brand of flea dip would work best on their cattle and which tonic would help a colicky horse. By the time he retired and his son Seth took over, the company had expanded to three stores in three towns and had 14 full-time employees.

As a youth, Seth had attended the state college and earned a degree in agricultural business. When he took over the company in 1975, he eagerly applied what he had learned to the family business. He was convinced that technology was the key to success, not personal relationships. Over the years, he struggled to convert all his father's old, handwritten records to electronic files. Eventually, he installed a completely computerized information system that tracked inventory, personnel, and accounts. He sometimes boasted about being an entrepreneur, but Clarence snorted at that term. "Just do what's right for your customers, and you'll be doing what's right for yourself," he would retort.

When Seth retired in 2015, his daughter Kathy took over the company, which now had 23 stores with 228 employees in three states and one wholly owned subsidiary of 18 gas stations. Kathy's vision involved offering a broader range of products than farm supplies. She wanted to sell the image of the family farm. Her stores stocked Western clothing; boots, hats, and jewelry; home furnishings; and even CDs featuring country music.

Kathy found herself traveling extensively from the corporate office to the various stores. Finding time to manage everything was a problem, but she had a staff of 12 professionals in the corporate office to assist her. E-mail, laptops, and smartphones helped tremendously.

Questions

1. How have communication practices and expectations differed for Clarence, Seth, and Kathy?
2. How do you think the management behaviors differed for the three owners?
3. What contingency factors might each owner have faced while they managed the company?

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